

THE POPE JOHN PAUL II BIOETHICS CENTER

AT

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**TO: Public Health Committee**  
**FROM: Deacon Tom Davis, Associate Director**  
**The Pope John Paul II Bioethics Center**  
**RE: H.B. No. 6645**  
**DATE: March 19, 2013**

My name is Tom Davis. I am a deacon in the Melkite Catholic Church and I am the associate director of The Pope John Paul II Bioethics Center at Holy Apostles College & Seminary in Cromwell, Connecticut, a research and advocacy center promoting greater respect for the precious gift of life and human dignity. I am also a practicing attorney. I offer these comments in opposition to H.B. No. 6645, "An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients".

The development of Hospice and palliative care modalities have revolutionized end of life care since the 1960s. Leading the way has been Calvary Hospital in the Bronx. Under the direction of Dr. Michael Brescia, who I understand will also address this committee on HB 6645, Calvary Hospital was the first certified palliative care hospital in America and continues to set the standard for the care of our dying brothers and sisters. By committing to the basic principles of non abandonment and professional excellence, Dr. Brescia and his staff, as well as countless care givers across the nation and the globe, have infused the dying process with compassion, companionship, and relief from excessive suffering. When that kind of care and presence are maintained it dramatically reduces the despair some express as death approaches.

Physician assisted suicide (PAS) will undermine much of the spiritual and emotional progress modern palliative care provides. Rather than offering solidarity and meaning, PAS will lurk in the background of end of life care. Some will face subtle pressure to make a quick exit and others will undoubtedly encounter the cynicism of a society preaching love but offering convenience. There is an alternative. It is "physician assisted living", and that requires adequate resources for pain management, state of the art medical care, social work, and companionship.

I have had the opportunity to review the testimony of Sr. Frances Smalkowski, CSFN, RN, PMHCS, BC, BCC, a catholic religious sister, registered nurse, psychiatric clinical specialist, and chaplain. She has been a prominent advocate of patient centered care in nursing

homes and hospitals for more than forty years. I had the pleasure of meeting her through her service as director of pastoral care at the Pope John Paul II Health Center, a nursing home in Danbury, which is also the city where my parish of St. Ann is located. Her service to and companionship with countless dying patients in Danbury is well known. Her comments are especially appropriate and I wish to adopt them as my own. Rather than repeating what she has said, I refer you to her written testimony on file with the committee.

Three years ago I accompanied my own father on his walk to the end of this life. His was a difficult and arduous final illness for various reasons, including the onset of mild dementia. Yet his physical pain, which would otherwise have been excessive, was well managed and he was able to share a deeper relationship with me and many people as death approached. It was instantly apparent that personal visits and commitment to non-abandonment encouraged him to find deeper resources of meaning and joy in his final weeks and months. How many more are there who will benefit from love? PAS is a failure of love. A better course for legislative action would be promoting greater access to pain specialists as well as the entire range of other specialists that make up palliative care in nursing homes, hospitals, other treatment locations, and residential settings.

Thank you for this opportunity to express my opposition and the opposition of The Pope John Paul II Bioethics Center to HB 6645.